news notes

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Toasts celebrate McCarty and 50-year-old DNA discovery

Fifty years to the day of the publication of the ground-breaking paper by Oswald Avery, Colin MacLeod and Maclyn McCarty showing that genes are made of DNA, The Rockefeller University hosted an anniversary toast at the site of the original discovery, The Rockefeller University Hospital.

With a vial of dry, white DNA in one hand and a glass of champagne in the other, Jules Hirsch, professor and physician-in-chief of the Hospital, welcomed the audience, which included labs associated with the Hospital, to the gathering. He was the first among the speakers—who included President Torsten Wiesel, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees David Rockefeller, and Deputy Mayor of New York City John Dyson—to raise a glass in salute of McCarty, now professor emeritus at the university.

President Torsten Wiesel spoke next at the festive occasion: "The implications of this discovery have been enormous, and we are still only at the beginning of the revolution that began 50 years ago with the paper by Avery, MacLeod and McCarty in *The Journal of Experimental Medicine*. We are particularly pleased that the leaders of New York City recognize the importance of this home-grown discovery and that Deputy Mayor John Dyson could come here to join our

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Symposium to honor Avery legacy

The Rockefeller University will hold a scientific symposium entitled "The Legacy of Avery" today (Feb. 4) in honor of the 50th anniversary of the 1944 paper by Oswald Avery, Colin MacLeod, and Maclyn McCarty, which showed for the first time that genes are made of DNA. Robert Austrian, John Herr Musser Professor Emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and John Robbins, chief of the Laboratory of Developmental and Molecular Immunity at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, will review Avery's scientific accomplishments and discuss subsequent developments in the fields of immunology and infectious disease—areas once pursued by the Avery laboratory.

"The 1944 paper came at the end of Avery's career," said Professor Emil Gotschlich, who will introduce the speakers. "In fact, Avery was recognized as an eminent scientist for his many contributions to the understanding of pneumococcal infection and treatment well before this historic paper. The symposium will give us the opportunity to more fully appreciate Avery's work as seen by two outstanding investigators who picked up where he left off and made great strides in these areas."

Robert Austrian

An expert on infectious diseases, particularly pneumococcal infection, Austrian was responsible for gathering clinical and bacteriologic data in the 1950s showing that, despite treatment with penicillin, mortality from pneumococcal disease was unacceptably high. He recognized that the disease could be prevented with polysaccharide vaccines originally developed by MacLeod and his associates during World War II. Austrian led the effort to re-introduce and improve the vaccines, which had fallen into disuse. Since their licensing in 1977, the vaccines have been used worldwide.

After graduating from Johns Hopkins University (A.B., 1937; M.D., 1941), Austrian served with the U.S. Medical Corps and Typhus Commission in the China-Burma-India Theater until 1945, then completed his residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital and later became physician and assistant director of the Medical Outpatient Department. In 1952, Austrian was appointed associate professor at the State University of New York College of Medicine. He became full professor in 1957. In 1962, he was named John Herr Musser Professor and Chairman of the Department of Research Medicine at The University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. He became

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Toasts celebrate McCarty and 1944 DNA paper

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50th anniversary celebration."

Rockefeller, who was a member of the Board at the time of the 1944 finding, also toasted McCarty: "Even if nothing else had been done at this great university, this extraordinary discovery has, in my judgment, more than justified—all by itself—the great hope and aspiration of my grandfather and father when they established this institution. It has given to the world what they hoped for: the beginning of the understanding of the inner mysteries of life and disease."

Dyson, who is a former member of The Rockefeller University Council, said: "The future of this city is always going to be connected to intelligence. And you at The Rockefeller University are one of the shining examples of this in New York."

At the end of the ceremony, McCarty made a few remarks, reminiscing briefly about his sense of relief, rather than celebration, when the paper came out 50 years ago. He also offered a toast to The Rockefeller University Hospital, which he called "the cradle of this research."

Other events during the week included a public lecture on the Human Genome Project by David Botstein, professor and chairman of the Department of Genetics at Stanford University School of Medicine, on Wednesday and a historic roundtable discussion with key scientists active in the period between 1944 and 1953 on Thursday.

Symposium to pay tribute to Avery's legacy

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emeritus in 1986 and continues to hold the position of professor of research medicine.

An active member of numerous advisory committees and editorial boards, Austrian has received many honors, including the Albert Lasker Award and election to the National Academy of Sciences and its Institute of Medicine.

John B. Robbins

A pediatrician and leading investigator in immunology, Robbins will speak on the development and use of polysaccharide-protein conjugate vaccines. Avery had explored the concept of using conjugates to prevent bacterial infection. Since then, Robbins and his colleagues have expanded Avery's chemical principles into a vaccine that has been successfully used to prevent *Haemophilus influenzae* type B infections and has been incorporated into the routine immunization of infants throughout the world.

A graduate of New York University (B.A., 1956; M.D., 1959), Robbins completed his training at the Massachusetts General Hospital in 1960 then held a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Florida, where he was later appointed assistant professor of pediatrics and microbiology. In 1967, Robbins joined the faculty of pediatrics at Albert Einstein College of Medicine as assistant, then associate professor and remained there until 1970, when he became clinical director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Subsequent appointments at the NIH include: chief of the Developmental Immunology Branch (1971-74); director of the Division of Bacterial Products with the Food and Drug Administration (1974-83); and chief of the Laboratory of Developmental and Molecular Immunity (since 1983).

Robbins has received numerous awards, including a Public Health Service Distinguished Service Medal from the U.S. Public Health Service at the NIH and election to the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine.

The scientific symposium, to be held in Caspary Auditorium at 3:45 P.M., will be preceded by tea at 3:15 P.M. in Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall.